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Inaugural Meeting of the Federation of
African Chambers of Commerce

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 17-19 September 198

Report of the Inaugural Meeting of the Federation of African Chambers of Commerce

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Opening Ceremony and attendance

1. The inaugural meeting of the Federation of African Chambers of Commerce was held in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) from 17 to 19 September 1984. It was officially opened by Comrade Wolle Chekol, Minister for Foreign Trade of Socialist Ethiopia and member of the Central Committee of the Workers Party of Ethiopia. Statements were made by Professor Adebayo Adedeji, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa and Comrade Alemu Aberra, Chairman of the Ethiopian Chambers of Commerce.

2. In his opening statement, Comrade Wolle Chekol, Minister for Foreign Trade of Socialist Ethiopia, welcomed the delegates and pointed out the crucial importance of the meeting as a major step in the implementation of the decisions made by the African heads of State and Government when they adopted the Lagos Plan of Action. He praised the participants for the commendable efforts they had made and the promptness and efficiency which marked the process of establishing the Federation of African Chambers of Commerce with the assistance of the ECA, OAU and AFPTO secretariats. He said that Ethiopia was a firm believer and supporter of Africa's self-reliance as recommended by the Lagos Plan of Action which provided guiding principles for the African countries to forge ahead in their development endeavour.

3. The Minister pointed out that it was a happy coincidence that the meeting coincided with the celebrations of the Tenth Anniversary of the Ethiopian Revolution and the founding of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia which were milestones in Socialist Ethiopia's relentless struggle against internal and external forces of reaction. For the first time in the history of Ethiopia a ten year Perspective Plan had been launched.

4. Recalling the various meetings which marked the process leading to the launching of the Federation of African Chambers of Commerce, he commended the impressive work done. He reiterated, however, that Africa was presently facing tremendous challenges. Its overall G.D.P. growth had fallen from from an average of 4.6 per cent to 2.3 per cent between 1960 and 1983. In fact, 21 African countries had shown no growth at all or had attained negative growth in the period 1970-1982. Moreover, Africa's excessive dependance on commodities, accompanied with a decline in terms of trade, resulted in glaring deficits of our balances of payments, mounting external indebtedness and deterioration in living conditions in most African countries. He therefore urged the Federation to institute ways and means of mobilizing African business enterprises for the attainment of ideals of collective self-reliance in order to overcome complex problems we are facing. To this end, he pledged Ethiopia's full support for the Federation which should be a strong institution based on African Unity.

5. Prof. Adebayo Adedeji, Executive Secretary of ECA, said that the meeting was a follow-up of a meeting organized in Cairo (Egypt) from 31 October to 1 November 1983 which resulted in the adoption of the Constitution and a "Declaration of Intention" indicating the determination of those present to establish the Federation of African Chambers of Commerce.

6. The Executive Secretary of ECA pointed out the importance of the meeting which marked a milestone in the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos which called for the establishment of a Federation of African Chambers of Commerce not later than 1985. He stated that the establishment of the Federation of African Chambers of Commerce was significant in a number of respects. First it was a step to the establishment of an African Common Market which was called for in the Lagos Plan of Action. Second, the Federation was a valuable mechanism which could improve the flow of trade information among African countries and further enhance the development of intra-African trade.

7. He also stressed that the importance of the Federation stemmed from the convention that collective self-reliance through intra-African co-operation in the fields of trade and industry presented the only viable alternative for ensuring self-sustaining development growth for Africa. Furthermore, the future of Africa was not in the promotion of trade in agricultural raw materials and primary commodities with the industrialized countries but rather in increasing the capacity to process our own local materials through the establishment of locally resource based-industries of Africa.

8. Professor Adedeji also indicated that the establishment of the Federation created a link among various associations and organizations engaged in agricultural production, manufacturing, commerce and industry and strengthened the bargaining position of such organizations vis-a-vis the rest of the world for it would harmonize their positions.

9. The Federation, he said, was to be regarded as part of the overall development processes in Africa and its activities should be organized against the background of broad development objectives such as the establishment of self-sustaining internally located processes of economic growth at the national, subregional and regional levels through collective self-reliance, the development of human resources with a view to ensuring an indigenous control of African economies. The Federation was also not an end in itself but a means towards achieving higher objectives. Much progress had been achieved in establishing subregional economic integration mechanisms such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Preferential Trade Area for Eastern and Southern African States (PTA) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). The Federation should join those subregional organizations in their endeavours to promote intra-African trade and co-operation.

10. Finally Professor Adedeji pledged his full support and that of the ECA in the implementation of the objectives of the Federation. He congratulated the participants for efforts and sacrifices made in the process of establishing the Federation of African Chambers of Commerce as a useful instrument of co-operation among African traders, businessmen manufacturers and industrialists.

11. Mr. Alemu Aberra, President of the Ethiopian Chambers of Commerce, welcomed all the delegates to Addis Ababa and expressed his sincere thanks for having been elected to chair the meeting. He pointed out the importance of the meeting as a follow-up of the First Symposium of the Presidents and Secretaries-General of African

Chambers of Commerce held in Addis Ababa in June 1981 as well as the meeting held in Harare (Zimbabwe) in May 1982 which decided to appoint an ad hoc Committee to review and finalize the Draft Constitution, the Draft Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly and the Governing Council, the Draft Organizational Structure of the Secretariat and the Budget and the Background Considerations for the Headquarters Agreement. The ad hoc Committee composed of Nigeria, Gabon, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and Egypt met in Addis Ababa in November 1982 and Cairo in October 1983 and submitted its recommendations to the meeting of all African Chambers of Commerce held in Cairo from 31 October to 4 November 1983. The Constitution and various documents were then amended and adopted. A "Declaration of Intention" was signed and a mandate was given to the ECA Secretariat to finalize the documents and to convene this meeting for the signing of the Constitution and the launching of the Federation.

Election of a bureau to chair the meeting till the final election of officers of the Federatuib

12. The heads of delegations elected Ethiopia as Chairman for the meeting and decided that the ECA Secretariat should serve as Rapporteur.

Attendance

13. The meeting was attended by delegates from Algeria, Angola, Benin, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Cameroon, Comoros, Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Tunisia, Sudan, Zambia, Zaire and Zimbabwe. The Federation of West African Chambers of Commerce and the Federation of Central African Chambers of Commerce were also represented.

14. The meeting adopted the following agenda:

1. Solemn ceremony for the signing of the Constitution of the Federation of African Chambers of Commerce;
2. Statements by heads of delegations;
3. Selection of the host country for the location of the headquarters;
4. Election of officers of the Federation and members of the Governing Council;
5. Consideration of the Draft Programme of Action for the first phase of operation of the Federation;
6. Any other business;
7. Meeting of the Governing Council for the adoption of its rules of procedure;
8. Adoption of the report and closure of the meeting.

15. It was also decided to allow the Federation of Central African Chambers of Commerce to take advantage of the solemn signing ceremony to deposit its constitution with the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

16. During the discussions for the adoption of the agenda, various delegations from West Africa held the view that the resolution passed by the Federation of West African Chambers of Commerce at Yamoussoukoro in April 1984 proposing amendments to the proposed Constitution should be circulated to all African Chambers of Commerce and discussed at a next meeting of the General Assembly of the Federation of African Chambers of Commerce. In the meantime, it was stated that the national chambers of commerce comprising the West African Chambers of Commerce would sign the present Constitution.

Solemn ceremony for the signing of the Constitution of the Federation of African Chambers of Commerce (Agenda item 1)

17. The signing ceremony took place at Africa Hall on 18 September 1984 from 10:30 to 12:30 in the presence of Comrade Wolle Chelol, Member of the Central Committee of the Workers Party of Ethiopia and Minister for Foreign Trade of Socialist Ethiopia and Professor Adebayo Adedeji, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa. Heads of delegations of the following countries deposited their instruments of accession and/or signed the Constitution: Algeria, Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, Tunisia, Zaire, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

18. Representatives of Ivory Coast and Morocco informed the meeting that their delegations would soon arrive in Addis Ababa to sign the Constitution.

19. Twenty four countries, having signed the Constitution, the Federation was declared legally established.

Statements of heads of delegations (Agenda item 2)

20. Statements were made by the heads of the following delegations: Djibouti, Egypt, Senegal, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Benin and Algeria. In their statements they expressed their gratitude to the people, the Government and the national Chamber of Commerce of Socialist Ethiopia for the warm welcome extended to them all the facilities which were made available for the meeting. They also congratulated the ECA secretariat and the ad hoc committee for their work and for the high quality of the documents before the meeting. They expressed the wish that the Federation be based on a clear understanding of the problems confronting the African countries. The Federation should contribute to the liberalization of trade and investments among African countries through an effective harmonization of trade legislations in Africa - emphasis was put on the professional nature of the Federation.

21. The delegates also emphasized that the Federation should aim at being fully operational soon after the period during which the ECA would serve as an interim secretariat. The Federation should take the necessary action to be accepted by OAU as a consultant on issues related to trade, economic development and integration. Heads of delegations pledged their support to the Federation. It was further emphasized that ways and means of reinforcing the Federation should be worked out to avoid deadlocks which jeopardized the existence of African subregional and regional institutions created in the past.

Selection of the host-country for the Federation's headquarters (Agenda item 3)

22. The head of the Egyptian delegation reiterated his country's offer to host the headquarters of the Federation and said that Egypt would comply with all the requirements set forth in the document before the meeting. He assured the meeting of the commitment of his country and its dedication to African unity in general and to the Federation in particular. Egypt was unanimously selected to be the headquarters of the Federation of African Chambers of Commerce.

Election of officers of the Federation and the Governing Council

(Agenda item 4)

23. A representative of the secretariat recalled that the item under discussion fell under articles 7 and 8 of the Constitution. Article 7 said that officers of the Federation shall be the Chairman, the First, Second, Third and Fourth Vice-Chairmen and the Secretary-General. Article 8 indicated that the Governing Council shall consist of the office-bearers of the Federation who were ex-officio members of the Council; ten members selected by the General Assembly having regard to the desirability of maintaining and equitable geographical distribution among the members of the Federation for a period of three years; a representative of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa; a representative of the Association of African Trade Promotion Organizations (AATPO); a representative of the host country of the Federation's secretariat; the chairmen of subregional organizations of chambers of commerce where such organizations exist; and states and institutions referred to in Article 10 paragraph 3 of the Constitution. After lengthy discussions the following were elected as officers of the Federation:

Bureau and Governing Council

Chairman	- Nigeria
1st Vice-Chairman	- Ethiopia
2nd Vice-Chairman	- Zimbabwe
3rd Vice-Chairman	- Zaire
4th Vice-Chairman	- Algeria

Benin
Burundi
Central African Republic
Djibouti
Mali
Sudan
Tunisia
Zambia

24. One post was left vacant to be filled as soon as one more country from Southern Africa signed the Constitution. The same applied to North Africa (Morocco will join the Council as soon as it signs the constitution)

25. The Federation of Central African Chambers of Commerce proposed that the First Secretary-General should come from that subregion. The Assembly agreed on that proposal and directed the Governing Council to act accordingly.

26. The first Vice-Chairman of the Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce took the floor and assured the meeting that Chief Adeyemi O. Lawson, the newly elected Chairman, was very dedicated to the cause of the Federation and the development of intra-African trade and co-operation.

27. He then proposed that the First Vice-Chairman of the Federation, President of the Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce should conduct the debates in the absence of the Chairman.

Consideration of the draft programme of Action for the first phase of operation of the Federation (Agenda item 5)

28. A representative of the secretariat introduced document E/ECA/TRADE/1[illegible] and pointed out that the paper was a summary of proposals for the interim period ending in June 1985 during which the ECA secretariat would act as an interim secretariat of the Federation. The proposals were intended to govern the activities of the Federation during the interim period. It was proposed that a mandate be given to the interim secretariat to prepare a draft medium-term plan; a draft budget in the light of the conditions of the host country of the Federation's secretariat; job descriptions for the posts to be advertised and submit applications to the Governing Council and to liaise with the officers of the Federation for the signing of the headquarters' Agreement and the reception of facilities offered by the host-country; to campaign for more signatories and service meeting of bodies of the Federation. It was also agreed that the interim period should be extended to September 1985 to give more time to the interim secretariat to discharge its mandate.

29. It was further suggested that in addition to its mandate, the interim secretariat should envisage undertaking studies on clearing and payments arrangements among subregions and maritime routes and facilities to improve intra-African trade. The interim secretariat was requested to prepare a scale of contributions to determine individual dues to be paid by member-chambers. A plan of action was adopted on the understanding that a draft budget will be prepared by the secretariat for submission to the Governing Council in March 1985.

Any other business (Agenda item 6)

30. (a) The President of the Federation of West African Chambers of Commerce informed the meeting about the establishment of the ECO Bank with a capital of 100 million U.S. dollars with a view to facilitating trade between economic operators within the subregion. The headquarters of ECO Bank would be in Lome, Togo and would start operating by 1985. (b) Members of the Federation were invited to announce the formation of the Federation of African Chambers of Commerce in their national news media upon their return to their homes.

Meeting of the Governing Council

31. The first meeting of the Governing Council of the Federation met on 19 September 198[illegible] and adopted its Rules of Procedure. It was agreed that the next meeting would be held sometime in March 1985.

Date and venue of the next meeting of the Genral Assembly

32. The meeting decided that the date and venue for the next General Assembly meeting should be decided by the interim secretariat in consultation with the Chairman.

Adoption of Report and Closure of Meeting

33. At the end of its deliberations, the General Assembly of the Federation adopted this report.

Vote of thanks

At the end of the inaugural meeting of the Federation of African Chambers of Commerce which was held in Addis Ababa from 17 to 19 September 1984 at the headquarters of the Economic Commission for Africa, the delegates present at the meeting and representing 29 States and two Federations of Chambers of Commerce:

- Welcome the establishment of the Federation of African Chambers of Commerce, the first organization of economic transactors established in line with the Lagos Plan of Action;

- Thank Comrade Mengistu Haile Mariam, Secretary General of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia, Chairman of the Provisional Military Administrative Council and Commander-in-Chief of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Socialist Ethiopia for the warm and brotherly welcome given them upon their arrival in Ethiopia, the facilities put at their disposal to enable them to accomplish their mission and the constant care taken of them throughout their stay.

Delegates at the meeting, held shortly after the ceremonies commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Revolution and the founding Congress of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia:

- Extend their warmest congratualtions and wishes for success and prosperity to Comrade Mengistu Haile Mariam, Secretary General of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia, Chairman of the Provisional Military Administrative Council and Commander-in-Chief of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Socialist Ethiopia and to the people of Ethiopia.

The delegates also avail themselves of this opportunity to express their gratitude to the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, the Association of African Trade Promotion Organizations and the Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce for all the efforts made towards the establishment of the Federation of African Chambers of Commerce.

Done in Addis Ababa on 19 September 1984

The Conference